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Farm Labor Campaign

No.-8

THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY IN AUSTRALIA

On October 15, 1942, a compulsory registration of women was announced by Prime Minister Curtin. At that time the enrollment in the Women's Land Army was as follows:

	Permanent	Seasonal	Total
New South Wales.....	870	--	870
Victoria.....	168	118	286
Queensland.....	50	167	217
South Australia.....	84	21	105
West Australia.....	2	--	2
Tasmania.....	55	3	58
Total.....	1,229	309	1,538

By the end of 1942, total membership of Women's Land Army in Australia had increased to approximately 1,900 persons. In that country uniforms and free transportation are provided; 4 weeks sick leave on full pay are granted, and 2 weeks holiday each year on full pay. A scheme of insurance covering WLA members is to be introduced. Girls working on parents' farms are not at present eligible for membership in the Women's Land Army; however it has been recommended to the Director General of Manpower that this be changed. Further details follow regarding developments in the state in which growth of the WLA has been most rapid.

The Women's Land Army in New South Wales came into active operation in January 1942 when about 100 women were enrolled for the pea-picking season. Since that time an additional 700 have been enrolled. All these are on a year-around basis, no registrations for seasonal work being accepted in New South Wales. In August 1942 requisitions for the coming crop season, which lasts from October to March, called for the enrollment of 2,000 women.

In New South Wales the headquarters of the Women's Land Army is in Sydney. Local operations are carried on through local committees which are responsible for the maintenance of satisfactory conditions of employment and housing. These local committees are made up of (1) local farmers, (2) the agricultural inspector of the district, (3) the manager of the local cooperative or packing house, (4) the mayor or shire president, and (5) the WLA representative.

Great care is taken in the selection of members of the Women's Land Army. Recruits must be within the age group of 18 to 36 and must be medically certified

(From mimeographed circular, "Wartime Use of Women in Agriculture," issued by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, USDA.)

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as physically fitted for the work. Training is provided mainly through actual work on the farms. Wherever possible WLA members are housed in central camps or hostels. Ordinarily they are not sent into a district unless there is work for a group of 20 or more. Camps are supervised by land matrons for whom training courses are provided by the government. Living on farms away from the central camp is permitted only to girls who have established a reputation for reliability. The heavy equipment for the central camps is provided by the farmers, the lighter necessities by the Women's Land Army. The usual conditions of employment call for a 48-hour work week and for wages varying from 3 pounds to 3 pounds 12 shillings a week.

WLA members are not provided for domestic work. Farmers employing WLA members must be insured under the Workmen's Compensation Act. Direct negotiations between a farmer and a Women's Land Army member regarding wages and conditions of employment are not permitted; all arrangements must be made with WLA headquarters or with the WLA liaison officer in the district.

The success of the Women's Land Army in New South Wales is regarded as resting upon two essential points: First, that service in the WLA shall be regarded as of a definitely national character, compared with that of women in other branches of the national service, and second, that their status be recognized through appropriate dress and working uniforms.

(Account based on material secured from British Office of Information)